

SCREWTAPE RETURNS TO HIS DESK

Fr. Michael Harper

The famous book by C.S.Lewis 'Screwtape Letters' was published just sixty years ago. In it the author wrote imaginary letters from one Demon to his underling, Wormwood. Through an unusual channel some more letters have come to light, and here is the first:

My dear Wormwood,

Exactly sixty years ago my father was writing to your father to encourage him in the battle against the Enemy and his silly followers. What a lot has happened in these years! I notice you are taking much more holiday than he was able to. The Enemy's followers are making such fools of themselves without our assistance it is making our task a lot easier, but be on your guard, the battle isn't won yet!

You have asked my advice about your new patient, and particularly because he is showing an unfortunate interest in the Orthodox Church. My father always saw them as our most dangerous adversary. They never seemed to respond to our suggestions that they needed to change and become modern. Many of our Enemy's followers have fallen for that one, hook, line and sinker. The glorious thing about trying to be modern is that you can never stop; it is an endless pursuit of an unattainable goal. You are 'modern' one day, and then you have to change again. But we love seeing them trying so hard. But this is not the way of the stupid Orthodox, who stubbornly stick to their old beliefs and out-of-date services. Another problem with these old-fashioned people is they don't claim to be 'post-modern'. They are not even modern. We have never been so foolish as to try to be modern ourselves, for we know it would be our undoing. So this is a hopeless tactic with these awful Orthodox people.

Another one of our successful ploys, which some of our agents have played to perfection, is the need to be 'relevant'. Fortunately no one seems bothered as to whether they should be relevant to our Enemy, as long as they are relevant to the latest social or political trends. Do keep them at it, for it makes them feel smug and self-satisfied, but it is no good trying this on the Orthodox. They look and seem the most irrelevant people on the face of the Enemy's earth. Leave well alone.

So what are you to do? First of all it is important to stop your man going to any services. If he does go it could be fatal. Get him to think 'I must study Orthodoxy before I can experience it.' I know some of my patients who are still studying it thirty years later! That fixes them. Sadly there is so much to study in Orthodoxy, but we can twist this to our own advantage. Get him so interested in the 'theory' of Orthodoxy that he is not interested in doing anything about it. It is a particular pleasure to see people going to Hell

with their brains stuffed with theology. We don't need to worry how much they learn as long as they don't do anything about it.

But if he does decide to go, the battle is not lost, you can still confuse him. My father, who, as I have said, warned me about the Orthodox Church, used to play a trump card, which always turned out a winner. He convinced the majority of people that the Orthodox Church was a foreign religion and nothing to do with being 'English'. You will not find this too difficult because the majority of Orthodox in Britain are not born British. And it is this policy which I recommend to you.

Keep your patient reading for as long as possible. But if he does decide to 'try it out' and go to an Orthodox church, then make sure he goes to one where the services are in foreign languages. That will confuse him. He won't understand anything, and will conclude that it is not for the British people. After the service make sure he only talks to people whose English is poor, or better still, who don't know any English, - which will not be too difficult because most of them will be non-British. Get him invited to have some food but make sure the food is strange to him.

But beware, Wormwood, of the cunning Antiochians who have all their services in English. Keep him away from them, for they are a new threat to us, and need to be taken seriously. In my next letter I will show you how to deal with this dangerous development.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape